

MEMORANDUM FOR: D/NFAC
7E44
HQS

NFAC 5628-81

Attached is a copy of the memorandum we prepared on Syrian intentions in Lebanon in response to the request from the NSC. It and a Special Analysis by [redacted] on the subject published in the 21 August NID were sent via LDX to the NSC on Saturday. Also attached are some extra copies if you wish to forward to the DCI.

*and
DDCI*

[redacted]
Helene L. Boatner
Director
Political Analysis

Attachment:
PAM #81-10350

Date 8 September 1981

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

5 September 1981

MEMORANDUM

SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON

Syria does not appear to be planning a major military move against the Christian Phalange in Lebanon in the near future. We believe the tough statements by Syria and its Lebanese surrogates prior to the Arab Conciliation Committee meeting in Beirut on September 3-4 were meant to set the stage for that meeting rather than for an imminent move against the Phalange. [REDACTED]

Syria has just obtained Phalange agreement to two of its key demands and this development probably will temporarily ease tensions in Lebanon. Phalange militia chief Bashir Jumayyil has acquiesced to a Syrian-inspired plan by the Arab Conciliation Committee to form a group to monitor the Lebanese coast and ports to ensure that no military supplies from Israel reach the Phalange. The two sides also agreed to cease media attacks against each other. [REDACTED]

Syrian efforts in the next few weeks will be focused on establishing the monitoring group, which will include representatives of Syria, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the Arab League, in the hope of inserting some Syrian military observers in Christian-controlled ports along the Lebanese coast. There almost certainly will be delays in implementing this arrangement because the Christians are likely to stall and insist that the group's mandate be broadened to include monitoring of arms shipments across the Syrian border--a major resupply route for Palestinian and Lebanese Muslim factions. [REDACTED]

This memorandum was prepared by the Israel-Levant Branch, Near East South Asia Division, Office of Political Analysis, National Foreign Assessment Center, in response to a request from the National Security Council. It was coordinated with the Office of Strategic Research. Information available as of 5 September 1981 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to Chief, Near East South Asia Division, [REDACTED]

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Over the past year, Syrian President Assad has moved cautiously to counter the growth of Phalange influence and assertiveness, while avoiding steps that would provoke a major confrontation with Israel. Assad will nonetheless continue to use a variety of political and military pressure tactics in an attempt to neutralize the Phalange-Israeli connection and gradually reduce Phalange influence in Lebanese politics. This strategy includes using surrogates such as former President Franjiyah in northern Lebanon or leftist Muslim groups in west Beirut to increase tensions periodically and maintain military pressure on the Phalange. [REDACTED] 25X1

We assess that Syria is unlikely to attempt to seize the ports through which the Phalange receives military supplies from Israel. Assad and other Syrian leaders know that the major military offensive needed to seize the ports would provoke an inevitable and quick Israeli military response. We believe Assad will continue to use incremental steps designed to whittle away Phalange influence and minimize the risk of Israeli intervention. An assessment of Assad's Lebanese strategy that recently appeared in the National Intelligence Daily is attached for your perusal. [REDACTED] 25X1

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[REDACTED] 25X1

SPECIAL ANALYSIS

SYRIA-LEBANON: Assad's Strategy

[REDACTED] 25X1

President Assad appears increasingly concerned that the Arab Conciliation Committee on Lebanon will urge him to support a solution of the crisis there that will commit Syria to a phased withdrawal of its troops. He will oppose any plan that threatens Damascus's preeminent political influence in Lebanon. At a minimum, he will maintain Syria's military presence in the Bekaa Valley [REDACTED] 25X1

Assad probably believes that a controlled level of tension in Lebanon will enable him to maintain Syrian leverage there and force the US and other Arabs to take Syria's interests into account. He knows that the Lebanese Government will continue to rely on Syrian forces to intervene in the fighting among the heavily armed factions in Lebanon. [REDACTED] 25X1

To strengthen Syria's hand in Lebanon, including its leverage over the PLO, Damascus has created a new militia--the Arab Cavalier Force--backed by Assad's brother Rifaat and led by officers from Rifaat's elite Defense Companies. The group recently clashed with Palestinian-supported Muslim factions in Tripoli. It may be used soon to intimidate Palestinian and Lebanese Muslim factions in Beirut into cooperating more closely with the Syrians. [REDACTED] 25X1

Strains With Palestinians and Christians

Syrian relations with PLO leader Arafat are again strained. The Syrians lost credibility in Palestinian eyes by not responding with military force to Israeli strikes against Palestinian positions in Lebanon last month. [REDACTED] 25X1

The Syrians in turn are unhappy with Arafat for accepting a cease-fire without consulting them. [REDACTED] 25X1

[REDACTED] 25X1

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[REDACTED] 25X1

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25X1

Damascus also is keeping the pressure on the Christian Phalange Party. The Syrians apparently have demanded that the declaration last month committing the Phalange to sever any ties with Israel be upheld by monitoring the Lebanese coastline for Israeli arms shipments. In addition, they demanded that the Phalange turn over its Israeli-supplied arms to Lebanese authorities. Phalange radiobroadcasts claim the Syrians are instigating clashes in northern Lebanon to reduce Phalange influence there.

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Strategic Considerations

Lebanon is militarily important to the Syrians, who believe that control of the Bekaa Valley is necessary to guard against an Israeli flanking attack on Damascus from the west. The Syrian military presence in Lebanon also gives Assad the means to rein in Arafat and to keep him from negotiating without Syrian approval. Assad knows that he must retain special influence over the Palestinians because they constitute his principal leverage in any future negotiations for a peace settlement and the return of the Golan Heights.

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Syrian influence in Beirut also helps to reduce the possibility that Lebanon might reach an unacceptable agreement with Israel directly. Periodic low-level clashes with Israeli forces in Lebanon, moreover, enable Assad to strengthen his credentials as the major Arab state confronting Israel while minimizing the risk to the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement on the Golan.

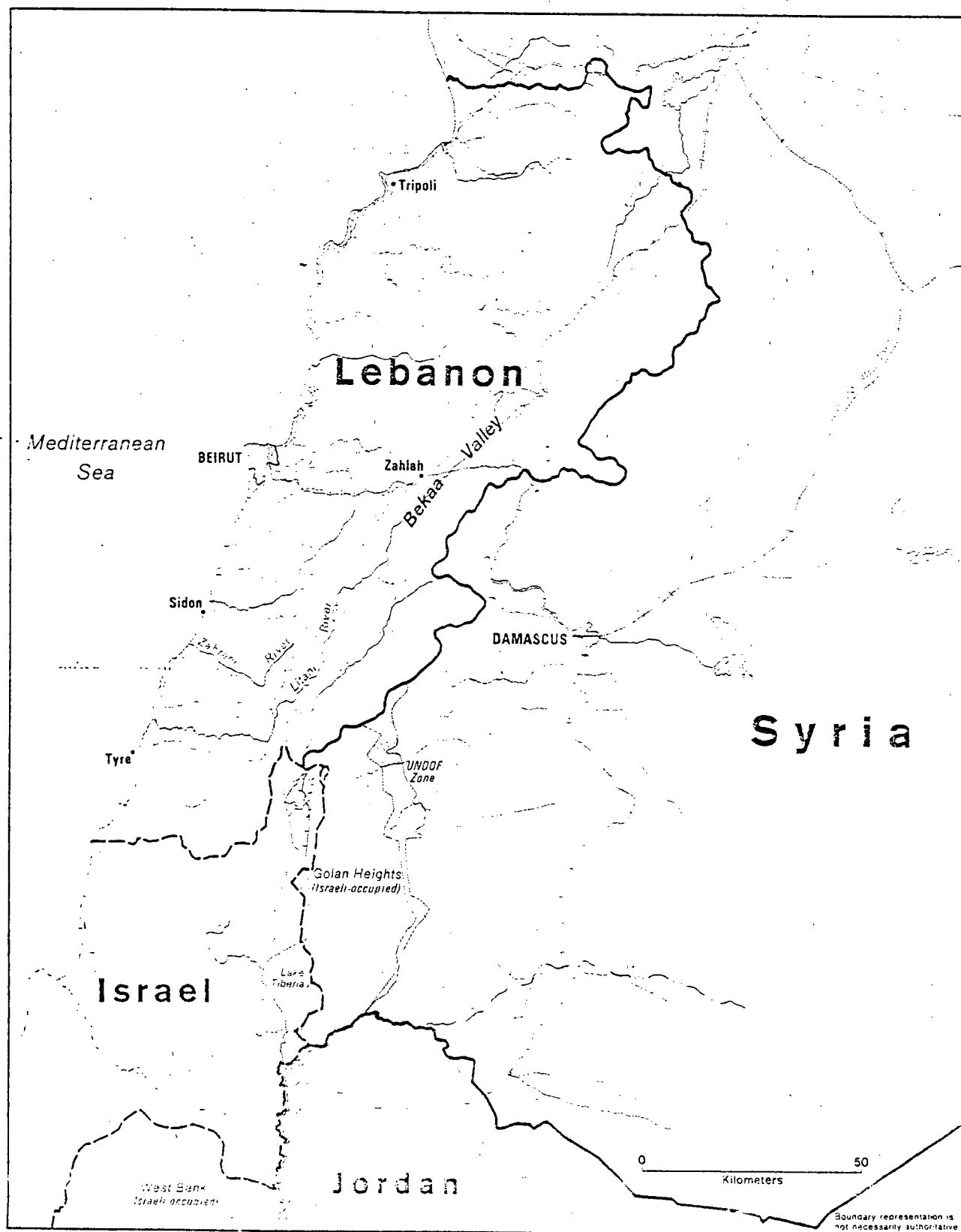
Assad remains suspicious of US intentions in the region and will oppose any initiative on Lebanon unless Syria has been consulted in advance. He probably is concerned about press speculation that a settlement of the Lebanese problem could provide an opening for a new initiative on the Palestinian question. Despite his wariness of the US, Assad wants to be included in any new negotiations and would like the US to come to him with alternatives for a comprehensive peace.

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SUBJECT: Syrian Intentions in Lebanon

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